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# THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

BY LINDLEY M. GARRISON, SECRETARY OF WAR

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THE problem of National Defense—how shall we solve it?

That, of course, depends upon what we consider the problem itself to be. The great difficulty at the present time arises out of a failure to agree as to its fundamental factors—a failure which is largely due to inattention and neglect.

I shall endeavor to consider the matter from the standpoint of reason and common sense, with a view to determining whether all sensible people should not be in agreement upon this most important subject.

The early settlers of this country brought with them an inveterate hatred of tyranny and oppression and all things connected therewith—including, of course, military force. Monarchies and oligarchies always had trained armies at hand and could even hire them in time of need, and they used them not only against alien populations, but often against their own people, and always to support the king and the nobles against the commons. It was inevitable that out of such circumstances a prejudice should grow; and although with us at this time it is without foundation, without reason, and although we may not be conscious of it, it still survives and persists. This prejudice cannot survive if brought forth and subjected to the light of reason and of common sense. Here, now, in this country, with the form of our government and the character of our people, there is no foundation for any fear that military force will impinge in the slightest degree upon the civil authority, or be used by the civil authorities, under whose command it is, to tyrannize over or oppress the people.

Another controlling factor in turning people aside from the proper consideration of this subject arises out of their abhorrence of what it connotes. To think of military precautions and military preparations brings to the mind warfare with all its horrors. Every humane and kindly instinct within

us shrinks from the contemplation of the evils attendant upon war. We hate to think of the sentiments aroused by war, the deeds committed, and the woe and wastefulness which ensue. Were it possible to abolish these evils by shrinking from the contemplation thereof, that remedy would long since have been effectually applied. Right-thinking people the world over have for centuries deprecated war and its evils; and if these evils could have been abolished by the simple process of refusing to think of them, that process would by this time have had world-wide application. Sensible people, however, realize the impossibility of so simple and easy a solution of this as of other similar distressing conditions of individual and national life.

No; turning aside will not do—it not only will not prevent the calamity, but it will serve to make its effects more disastrous when it does come. If we would respect ourselves, and deserve the respect of others, and have that courage without which man is useless, we must not shrink from or shirk our problem because of any of its repellent or repulsive features.

A great deal of inattention, and considerable opposition, is based upon the statement and belief that if a nation takes military precautions and makes military preparation, it invites what it seeks to prevent or repel. This contention does not seem to have any foundation in reason or in fact. It certainly is not so in any similar situation, in either our spiritual or our physical life. Those who entertain and give expression to this feeling would be shocked, I am sure, if a similar attitude were applied to other like matters. Does the citizen invite the conflagration by preparing a force to extinguish and minimize the results of fire? Do men invite ill health by taking precautions to preserve the soundness of their bodies and by having a force of trained physicians to prevent and minimize the disastrous consequences of disease? Does a body of scientific sanitarians, trained and ready to cope with epidemics, invite the latter or make them more likely to come upon us? Do business men who make wise disposition of their means against the possibility of panic invite the latter and make it more likely to occur? Surely none of these things is so, and just as surely there is no rational basis for believing that a nation which takes proper military precautions and makes proper military preparations is inviting war.

They, however, who deprecate the taking of these precautions and the making of these preparations urge still further

opposition somewhat akin to that just disposed of. They say: "If you are strong enough to fight, you are more likely to fight," or, stated in the negative, "If your nation is not prepared for war, your nation will be less likely to be involved in war."

To be perfectly frank, I cannot perceive the slightest basis in reason or fact for such a contention. Where in the realms of spiritual or physical life do those who urge this contention find any basis for its soundness? Do the things which we call evil refrain from assaulting the weak, the flabby, and the feeble? In the physical sphere, where and when have feebleness and flabbiness and weakness acted as a shield and a buckler? Where in the history of nations do we find the strong staying its hand because of the feebleness of its rival? The pages of history literally abound with instances to the contrary. Civilizations which in their day reached the highest pinnacles of mental, spiritual, and physical life have disappeared from the face of the earth, and their names are almost forgotten by men, because they became feeble and flabby and were toppled over by the strong. Inanimate nature and human nature progress by the survival of the fittest, and they who are weak and flabby are not fit. If by this suggestion those who entertain it mean, as they would seem to mean, that the strong are more likely to use their strength than the weak, and that therefore a strong nation is more likely to go to war than a weak nation, let them frankly say so and be prepared to answer the obvious question which then arises. That question is, how do you justify your trust that other nations which are strong will refrain from misusing their strength against us, if you fear that we, if strong, would misuse our strength against other nations? There is no basis for any such unjust animadversion against our nation and our people. There is no better test of real strength than self-control. If we cannot trust our own strength and our control of our strength, if we cannot trust ourselves not to misuse our strength, how much reliance should we, as sensible men, place upon the conduct of other nations which are strong?

No; that idea cannot find permanent lodgment in any reasoning mind. If the only reason that we should not prepare such strength as may be necessary to protect ourselves is because of a fear that we may be tempted to misuse it and may in fact do so, it were better to run that risk than the risk of defenselessness against the strength of others, which is just as likely, on this theory, to be misused against us.

We have been viewing this last objection solely on its

negative side; but upon its positive side there is just as much against it, and more, which needs consideration. The Hebrew Scriptures tell us that righteousness exalteth a nation. Whether justly or not, we firmly believe that we are a righteous nation—that is, that our intentions are toward the right. We certainly intend no marauding aggression, and entertain no covetousness, against that which belongs to others. But righteousness is not universal in either the spiritual sphere, or the individual sphere, or the community, or the national or international sphere. Righteousness is not self-executing. If it is to prevail, the unrighteous must be overthrown; and wherever injustice and unrighteousness take up arms to impose their will upon the just and the righteous, the latter must be prepared to withstand the assault and to prevail, if they are to survive as moral forces in the world.

Peace—yes; peace based upon righteousness. But in the spiritual and the personal and community life there will always be conflict of one sort or another so long as there exist the two contending forces of righteousness and unrighteousness.

Government without force is unthinkable until unrighteousness is abolished from the earth and mankind has ceased to be subject to the present forces of inanimate and animate nature. Until that day comes, however, mankind must fortify and strengthen itself to withstand the assaults which it must inevitably expect, both spiritual and physical.

Some find justification for neglect and inattention, upon the assumption that, for one reason or another (or, more truly stated, for no reason), war will never come to this nation. Here again it seems difficult to find a shred of foundation for such a belief. Certainly I cannot find any assurance which vindicates such a judgment. Our geographical position undoubtedly minimizes the danger of invasion of our continental possessions. Our lack of aggressive intention and our righteous intentions minimize the sources and causes of war. But we ourselves have frequently been at war; our isolation has not as a fact assured our freedom from conflict; other nations relatively as isolated have been involved in war; and no sound reason can be adduced which would justify a sane man in concluding that isolation alone spells safety. Furthermore, our isolation is geographical only. No nation dwells unto itself alone. Modern conditions have caused the interests of nations to be as correlated as those of families who have intermarried. The

interests of many of the large nations to-day are inextricably interwoven with those of some or all of the others.

Nor can sure reliance be placed upon our lack of aggressive intention, our freedom from covetousness, or our tendency toward righteousness. The conflicts and struggles in the spiritual and the physical spheres are not always or often between the unrighteous and the unrighteous, or between the covetous. Evil preys upon virtue, the unjust upon the just, and the covetous upon those whose possessions they covet.

Self-respect, without which man is an invertebrate animal, requires that we should be prepared to protect that which we cherish, which not only includes our material possessions, but that intangible something which makes us a distinctive nation in the eyes of the world.

No; we cannot justify neglect on this score; we cannot rest assurance upon righteous intention, or lack of bad motives, or possession of good motives, or isolation.

Another obstacle to the proper consideration of the subject is potent, though perhaps in many cases unconscious. It is the question of expense or cost. Men set aside for military service, and money spent for military material, are assumed to be wasted; and this consideration causes many to turn aside from a further consideration of the subject.

Whatever is necessary to provide for the common defense must be done at whatever proper cost. The individual citizen surely does not feel, in those aspects of this matter which come most closely home to him, that such expenses are unwarranted. He cheerfully sees the public money devoted to the salaries of executives that execute the laws and enforce the right as against the wrong, to courts that adjust the disputes between the community and the individual and between individuals, and that determine the right and make it effective; to officers of justice, whether police or sheriffs or organized military force, which protect the life and the property of the citizen and withstand the assaults of those who would overthrow public order and good government; to those who are trained and equipped to fight fires and to fight disease and to prevent epidemics and to minimize their consequences if, notwithstanding every precaution, they overtake us. Increasingly in all these lines the public are insisting upon further and further progress, which necessarily is attended with more and more expense.

There need be no fear, therefore, that the people will shrink

from any proper expense attendant upon measures of common defense after a common agreement has been reached.

There is one other potent influence making for neglect of the present consideration and settlement of this great subject. I refer to those who refuse present consideration of existing conditions because of a belief or hope that by some international agreement new conditions will obtain and new forces be brought into play. I can and do entirely sympathize with every sane and sensible movement that tends to abolish conflict and to insure peace; but I am utterly out of sympathy with the idea that we should neglect or postpone consideration of what is now the existing condition because of a hope or belief or even conviction that it may be altered, even radically altered, in the future. Every right-thinking man sympathizes with every aspiration for peace. It may be possible to establish an international tribunal, to limit the armament of nations, to provide means by which the decrees of the international tribunal can be made effective by forces drawn from its constituent nations, and that a long step forward may be made toward abolishing physical conflict between nations. I am firmly convinced that no nation in the world has a more sincere and active desire to this end than has our nation. If by anything that I could do or leave undone I could contribute to this end, I should welcome the opportunity thus afforded. This, I am sure, is the sentiment of the people of our nation.

But such a great epochal event in the world of nations can be brought about only by those who are strong, courageous, self-respecting, and righteous; by those who look facts fearlessly in the face and act accordingly; by those whose conduct is guided by reason and judgment. And if we are a nation composed of people possessing the characteristics just mentioned and actuated by the motives just referred to, then we will fearlessly and courageously take up the present problem which it is our duty to determine, and will determine it properly and be prepared in the proper way and with the proper spirit for what may come hereafter. No sensible mind can believe that we will be more forceful in attaining our aspirations for peace because of an open exhibition of feebleness and weakness in the solving of existing problems. The voice which is firm and clear, which is heard and heeded, proceeds from the strong, sound, virile man pledged in word and in deed to righteousness. Those who hope to be in the van of a great movement to alter the current of human history and establish a new era must

show ~~themselves~~ to be courageous and wise and self-respecting in the way ~~they~~ have handled the duties enjoined upon them in their national life. Hideous as is the face of war, abhorrent as are the evils consequent upon it, its results in the long run cannot be so fatal to a nation as would be the failure of that nation courageously and fearlessly to ascertain its duty and to do it.

Let us, therefore, take this matter up in the proper spirit, and submit those feelings which stand in the way of its proper consideration to the analysis and valuing of reason and common sense. Let us realize that our duty lies plain before us, and that there is no substance or worth in the obstacles which obscure the vision and obstruct the path. Let us align our vision and our courage and our judgment and keep them at work until we reach a common agreement. It can only be settled in that way, and it must be settled in that way. It is a subject which vitally concerns the nation and each citizen of the nation. It not only involves the integrity of the nation and the safety of the citizen and what he holds dear, but the safety of our institutions and of those who are to come after us. We must brush aside all attempts to make it the opportunity for personal advantage or advancement, and must absolutely exclude any political partisanship. This is the people's problem—the solution rests with us. If we have the proper stamina, we will face it and settle it; if we have not, that condemnation, old as the book of Genesis, will echo in our ears: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

I purposely refrain from discussing the policy which should be adopted and the details which must be carried out to make that policy effective. Difficult as it will be to accomplish properly these things, such difficulties are immeasurably increased by a lack of a coherent public opinion, and will be immeasurably lightened when public opinion has crystallized and is put in motion. If the individual citizen can be brought to realize his responsibility in this connection, and will banish prejudice, refuse to be diverted by sentiment unfounded on facts, and will not shrink or shirk his duty as he thus finds it, the rest of the task will be possible of accomplishment. Do not shrink from what you must consider; do not permit yourself to be diverted by terms of opprobrium. Militarism is used as a term of reproach to divert proper consideration of what *must* be considered, if the subject is to be considered at all. Militarism,



in the sense of having the military force interfere in the slightest with the conduct of government by our civil authorities, is not conceivable in this country, is not urged by any one, and is not feared even by those who use the word in that sense to prevent proper consideration and to confuse the public mind. Militarism in the sense of the absolute necessity of proper military precautions and military preparations is the subject-matter for consideration; it is the imperative question for decision; and it needs stout hearts and sound minds to decide it. We are surely not so deluded as to believe that we can reach by intuition what others can acquire only by training and experience. We are surely not so sacrilegious or irreverent as to believe that Providence has unjustly discriminated in our favor and against the other peoples of the world. We surely will not admit that any vital national duty will be neglected and left undone because we shrink from the proper contemplation of it. We surely will not admit that we are unable to read history intelligently, to consider facts relevantly, and to reach conclusions sensibly.

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